

Inverness-shire in 1968

By COMMANDER G. W. HARPER, R.N. RETD., F.R.E.S.

At long last the depressing ebb tide in the Lepidopterous population of the Scottish Highlands which has been so evident during the last few years seems to be on the turn. The evidence for this lies convincingly in my 1968 m.v. light-trap figures, which for the comparable six-month period from April to September yielded a respectable total of 5385 moths, more than twice the 2500 total for 1967. How far the improvement is due to the very fine dry summer we had here in the North remains to be seen, but at least we can hope that a real start of a flood tide will be seen in the next few years.

The 1967-8 winter was about average with a few severe frosts down to Zero F., but no thick snow cover. A quick thaw on 14th January brought a beautiful sight in my spinney in the form of a small passing flock of nine Waxwings vainly searching for berries, and on 18th the first male *Phigalia pedaria* Fab. of the new season emerged and rested on my neighbouring electricity post as usual. This species continued emerging in all mild spells until early March.

February weather followed the normal pattern of fairly continuous frost and light snow, but also long periods of cloudless sunshine; beautiful but not entomologically productive!

Early in March saw a slow thaw begin, which produced the first immigrant Plovers and Oystercatchers passing through on a northerly course on 8th, when bees were beginning to forage at the Snowdrops, and a tentative dawn chorus began. I then started my m.v. trap, but this only produced an occasional *P. pedaria* until 23rd, when the first *Achlyia flavicornis* L. and *Orthosia gothica* L. together with *Conistra vaccinii* L. appeared. The month ended with the return of severe frosts and snow blizzards.

Springlike weather returned on 9th April, and on 10th a big emergence of my local colony of *Poecilopsis lapponaria* Bdv. took place, followed quickly by all the common early Spring species.

The Sallows were well out by the middle of April, emergence continued and I was delighted to welcome back a lamented absentee of recent years, *Panolis flammea* Schf. (*piniperda* Panz), but only a single specimen. Mr. E. C. Pelham-Clinton also found it and two *Endromis versicolora* L. near Aviemore, another species which has caused anxiety in recent years but seems to be just surviving. The month ended with the conclusion of the fine spell of weather and the season about average, and about a fortnight earlier than last year.

May began with snow on the high tops and a fine male *Odontotia carmelita* Esp. in the m.v. trap. The cold spell continued with snow, frost and bitter East winds until the last week, so that the emergence of the moorland species was badly delayed, fresh *Anarta cordigera* Thun. and *Isturgia carbonaria* Cl. not being seen until 22nd May. Light trap catches were very small, though a few common late Spring species did appear. *Pieris napi* L. and *Anthocaris cardamines* L. began emerging on the last day of the month.

June opened with chilly stormy weather, but the early summer species began emerging in fair numbers, and the weather warmed up culminating in a glorious hot sunny spell from the 9th to the 19th of the

month, an almost exact copy of the 1967 June spell and of the same duration. My son Dr. M. W. Harper and I were lucky in that we had booked a long week-end for a Burnet hunt in the Island of Mull from the 13th to the 17th of June. Our quest was greatly helped by the pioneer work of others including Mr. W. G. Tremewan, and we were successful in finding several small isolated colonies of *Zygaena loti* Denis & Schiff. (*achilleae* Esp.) on the West coast of the island. The species was well out and in good condition, many pairs being found *in cop.*, but *Z. purpuralis* was only beginning its emergence. We found no Burnets elsewhere, and no *Z. filipendulae* L., but we did discover a fine colony of *Procris stances* L. near Grass point on the East coast, and it was very interesting to watch the adults on the wing, and also feeding, not on the larval foodplant, *Rumex acetosa*, but on the equally abundant Bluebells flowering amongst the young Bracken. One curious fact we noted was that the insects appeared always to extend their probosces and draw their liquid sustenance from the outside of the perianth, and did not insert it into the "bell". M. W. Harper also found another species which may be a new record for the island, *Jodis lactearia* L. flying among Hazel in woodland. We found *Euphydryas aurinia* Rott. widespread over the island but uncommon and not in colonies. Also on 15th we found *Argynnis aglaia* L. already emerging, a very early date. Back in Badenoch, on the 18th M. W. Harper found no less than eight specimens of *Hyppa rectilinea* Esp. resting on fence posts on high ground above 1500 feet altitude on the open hillside, and a small number of *Psodos coracina* Esp. flying amongst the detritus of the high tops even though the "even" numbered year was not favourable for it. Cool showery weather now supervened; m.v. trap catches of usual species remained small for the rest of the month, but I had the pleasure of recording a new addition to my local list in a fresh specimen of *Ecliptopera silaceata* Schf. The foodplants, *Epilobium* species have become increasingly common in recent years and I hope the moth will soon become established, as it is already locally on the West coast as far as the Isle of Skye. The month ended with a large immigration of single-brooded *Pieris brassicae* L. which I noted flying in a general westerly direction into Inverness from the Moray Firth; within the next few days some had penetrated as far as Upper Speyside. But here we had no trace of the great Saharan dust storm which brought so many interesting immigrants and deposited them in England with the dust!

July was a rather disappointing month; the first half was cold and showery with predominantly North and East winds; later quiet and pleasant but cloudy conditions did not conduce to seeing many butterflies, and all species seemed to be in small numbers when on the wing, the Lycaenids being particularly scarce; m.v. trap catches however continued to be fair, but no interesting species occurred. The month ended with a short series of the heaviest rain storms I can ever remember since my tropical travels!

August was a much better month, dry, fine and warm with good sunny periods except for a very wet spell in the middle of the month. The m.v. light trap catches improved greatly, the year's record of 170 individuals occurring on the 13th with 32 species, high for this part of the Kingdom. On 15th August I was pleased to detect a number of slightly worn *Alcis jubata* Thun. resting on Oak trees in an old wood near Inverness. On 22nd

after many years I paid a visit to what used to be called the Culbin sands on the Moray Firth coast near Forres. My worst fears were confirmed and the whole large area has been utterly ruined entomologically by almost complete afforestation with conifers. I was only able to find one minute area of sandhill left wherein to work my portable m.v. light. It was a warm night, but very few coastal species were seen among the fair number of others; the most interesting and totally unexpected insect was a male *Mormo maura* L. in mint condition, an astonishing sight! It is thought possible that this record may prove to be a most northerly one. The month ended with fine sunny weather continuing, and all the early Autumn species emerging freely.

September continued the pleasant quiet weather but punctuated with a few wet days and a sharp frost on 19th, and the first and only *Plusia gamma* L. on 22nd! *Noctua pronuba* L. was also mercifully in short supply this year!

The first week of October was notable for the first big movements of migrating birds, a huge gaggle of about two hundred geese flying South at a great height on 2nd, and several large flocks of fieldfares passed through my spinney during next few days, completely consuming all Rowan berries in the process. A storm force (10) wind on 13th then removed almost all leaves and killed off most of the moths, so that the season virtually petered out quietly by the end of the month, when snow and frost ushered in November. Thus ended a much better year than recently, but with no events of outstanding entomological interest.

Nedaich, Newtonmore, Inverness-shire. 13.i.69.

Collecting Notes for 1968

R. G. CHATELAIN, D. O'KEEFFE, B. F. SKINNER

The season in the south-east has been pretty dismal and it is only by burning a prodigious amount of petrol that sufficient results have been achieved to enable this note to be written. Even so, on some occasions the best capture proved to be a fine series of green shield stamps. The following account includes trips undertaken by one or more of us and we apologise if the result is disjointed.

Operations did not really start until early March when a few visits were made to Petts Wood with paraffin lamps to collect *Erannis marginaria* Fab. and *E. leucophaeria* Schiff. The first trip with the generators was on 9th March when the three of us descended on Hamstreet to welcome the common spring species, including a few *Apochima hispidaria* Schiff., *E. leucophaeria* and many *Achlys flavicornis* L. A further visit to the same locality by O'K. and S. on 24th produced the same species plus a multitude of *Biston strataria* Hufn. and the common *Orthosia*s which were just beginning to appear. Friday Street, Surrey, on 27th March produced little of note except for a somewhat early *Panolis flammea* Schiff, at sallow. On 31st, S. and C. accompanied Messrs Rogers and Sadler to a spot near Winchester where about a dozen *Trichopteryx polycommata* Schiff., mostly worn, were sitting around on the privet. A visit to Alice Holt Forest later that night resulted in two mint *Gypsotea leucographa* Schiff. S. ran his lights at Ranmore on 29th when a dozen male *A. hispidaria* turned up and two *G. leucographa* were taken at sallow.